

# Stooky



Percy Crosby



Hiii - yr Book -

HAPPY BERTHDAY  
FROM  
ZKIP -

MAY 1932





BY PERCY CROSBY

**SKIPPY**

**DEAR SOOKY**

**ALWAYS BELITTLIN'**

**CARTOONIST'S PHILOSOPHY**



*"I kept starin' over the steeple at the mountains far away,  
wonderin' if Santy Claus an' his reindeers would  
whiz across the sky."*

# DEAR SOOKY

By

PERCY CROSBY

*Author of "Skippy"*



*With Illustrations by the Author*

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DEAR SOOKY

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Dr.  
Edgar Parker  
" " " "



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DEAR SOOKY



# DEAR SOOKY

DEAR SOOKY:

I'm stayin' down here to my uncle's house in Virginia an' it's so big that I almost rattle around in it; everything's so quiet an' still. Time doesn't mean nothin' sorta, an' ya only know the day is over when the shadows of the great big trees stretch across the lawn. They make you think of giants' yawnin' arms. Then the crickets begin to tick-tack on the night.

When twilight comes, we light all the candles an' my aunt goes in the drawing-room an' plays the piano. My uncle is lyin' on the sofa sippin' up his pipe when he sees me go over to the candles an' make little balls outa the wax drippings. I got shushed out cause my aunt was playin' the Moon-

DEAR SOOKY

light Sonora, so that was my kew to go tip-toein' off the porch an' out on the lawn. I looked back at the house an' it was certainly very elegant with all the candle lights in the windows. I got to wonderin' if the house was insured, an' if it was, how nice it would look all on fire. It would be swell helpin' around with the hose, an' after, me an' all the firemen would clutter up the kitchen an' make hot coffee an' sandwiches an' talk over how we saved the place.

All of a sudden the moon squinted over the house, an' sure enough if I don't remember Carol an' the postcard I didn't get yet.

Out on the grass the music seemed to get sifted through the trees an' it was so soft that it made me think of a lot of elves trapezin' over spider webs. For a long time I watched the fireflies spanglin' up the lawn, then I went to the back of the house. From there, ya could see the moon dimplin' the



*"I got to wonderin' if the house was insured, an' if it was, how nice it would look all on fire."*

DEAR SOOKY

water. Of course that's all very swell on the surface, but who would want to go underneath it an' get mixed up with a lot of oogily-oogily turtles.

While I was standin' there gapin', I heard a noise in back of me an' of course I thought of robbers right away—but who should it be but my uncle's ridin' horse, Star. He came right over to me an' rubbed his nose on my shoulder an' up against my ear just as if to say, "Go ahead, sneak in an' get some sugar—nobody'll know." Well, you know me, kid. I filled my pockets. All to once my uncle calls me an' the horse cluppety-clups, cluppety-clups into the distance. He knew he done wrong.

There was nothin' more to do so I goes back in the house an' scours around the pantry for cookies, but I couldn't find any. I moseyed around an' got a piece of bread an' butter an' started munchin' that an'

DEAR SOOKY

lookin' through the curtains, waitin' till  
they got through the Sonora so I could ask  
my uncle for the sportin' sheet.

Affectionately sincere,

SKIPPY.



DEAR SOOKY:

Here it is Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday an' Monday, an' I ain't got so much as a satin postcard from Carol. I've been countin' my fingers over an' over just waitin'; to forget her I tried to lose myself in the woods back of the house, but down by the brook the whole place was singin' love. For a long time two dragon flies was hoppin' from rock to rock an' around the trees. The man dragon fly had a very bright green pair of pants on, but the lady dragon fly didn't care for green, I guess, because off she goes with a dragon fly with the dirtiest brown pants you ever saw. It got me to thinkin' of that new guy that lives next door to Carol. Did you ever see him yet that he didn't have a brown suit on?

DEAR SOOKY

To get my mind off it I looked at some ants. One was carryin' a great big spider home for supper, playin' he was a fisherman cartin' home an octopus. Ants is very dumb anyway. Then I got to thinkin' of spiders so I watched one makin' a web. But it only reminded me of the lace curtains Carol an' me was goin' to have in our house an' I just couldn't stand it one more minute, so off comes my shoes an' stockings an' I paddle around in the brook.

I was havin' a lot of fun until I got to thinkin' of bath-tubs. With that I puts on my shoes an' stockings an' decides to go down to the general store an' buy Carol somethin' an' maybe that way I could scurry up some word from her. I'm beginnin' to think she don't love me back any more. When a guy hasn't anybody to play with, you begin to feel it. I wouldn't care if there was some fellows or somethin', but

DEAR SOOKY

no, sir, just animals down here an' the hired man.

I borrowed fifteen cents outa the Sunday School barrel an' bought a string of blue beads with it, but Aunt Emily saw them an' she said it ain't proper to give jewelry to a girl. There was nothin' to do but cut 'em up, but maybe I didn't have the chickens hoppin' around all afternoon, flippin' them with the bean-shooter.

Now the beads is all gone so the farm's quieted down. A hen comes cluckin' around with a brood of chicks an' I happened to remember of a picture Carol gave me. Only it was of the whole class, so when Aunt Emily isn't lookin' I cop a lot of beauty spots off her bureau an' paste 'em over all the other faces. I was so busy doin' this that I found the only face I didn't paste up was Lizzie Krausmeyer's an' it took me all afternoon liftin' up the corners again, tryin'

DEAR SOOKY

to find Carol. I don't know whether I found her or not 'cause they all came up fuzzy with no faces on at all. It got me to figurin' how Carol would look with white hair, an' I wondered if she had white hair an' wrinkles all over her face would I like her? I don't know—yes, I would too! But sometimes I hate her for not sendin' a postcard. No, I don't neither. Oh, love's a funny business!

Will you do me a favor, but don't tell anybody? Ask her, an' don't say I asked you, who she loves best—that guy with the brown suit, or me, or maybe somebody else? An' if she don't love me, don't tell me 'cause I don't want to know.

Ask your mother to get out the dream book an' see what this dream means, because if it means what I think it does, I'll be skatin' on velvet the rest of my life. In bed I couldn't close my eyes all last night, see,

DEAR SOOKY

Sook, 'cause of thinkin' so much about love.  
All of a sudden—zingo! I bats out a little  
slumber.

First I find that I'm in a great blue space.  
It made me feel like I was a little flea in a  
big bowl. I didn't seem to have my feet in  
the bowl an' yet I didn't have any wings  
on, an' there I was, sorta walkin'-floatin'  
around. Then zingo! a long, straight road,  
bright as silver, plunks up against my feet.  
Me, no less, walkin' on a straight narrow  
path. So I says to myself, this can't be me.  
I wanted to jump off on a couple of jiggily-  
wiggilys, but somethin' kept me on this  
long, silver road an' I begins to wonder.  
Never before did I feel so happy—I wanted  
to sing, only I couldn't, because I was listen-  
in', an' this is crazy as a derby full o' fleas,  
but it seemed as if all the music in the world  
was playin' inside me—but how could I be  
all the world? I ain't big enough for that. I

DEAR SOOKY.

was even thinkin' that in the dream. It's funny how you can remember dreams, yet it's the first time I can ever remember keepin' my mouth shut.

I kept shufflin' along the road until I skidded to the right, an' you coulda knocked me dead 'cause I just noticed there was a road runnin' alongside the one I was on, an' it came to a junction, an' there is Carol. I couldn't say nothin' 'cause all the music went from me to her an' I thought at the time, maybe I'm her an' she's me. It was awful funny—we just sorta came together natural. There wasn't any place to go, but just one road right from the fork. I didn't know what to do so I stopped, but she takes hold of me an' we go arm in arm on the one road. It was the first time I could find my tongue an' I asks her what road this is.

"Well," she says, "this is the road to happiness." An' I asks, "How do you

DEAR SOOKY

know?" So she says, "'Cause we're on a great big tuning fork an' while we're together we're helping to make harmony for the universe." I said, "You never sent me a postcard, what's the big idea?" Then—Zippo! I dreamt I was a fly bein' stirred up in a bowl of milk an' I got dizzier an' dizzier. Darned if I can remember the rest—

See what the dream means an' if it ain't any good, I'll dream it over again tonight maybe, but I must remember not to make a crack about that postcard.

Affectionately sincere,

SKIPPY.



DEAR SOOKY:

Here I am, doin' home-work an' the Orpheum's sellin' standin' room. An' me without a breath of air since supper. All work an' no play makes Jack a dull boy.

I had to know somethin' about pyramids so I went in an' asked Pop. He had to stay in, too, 'cause he was out playin' cards last night. I showed him the picture in the geography an' asked about it. Pop says, "Men in those days was all for makin' very strong houses, and, to keep the drafts out, they built 'em without windows." Maybe the builders figured they'd never rent them anyway an' they didn't want them on their hands. As far as I could find out, they must have just slapped them up to keep camels from trippin' over loose stones.

DEAR SOOKY

They're over a hundred feet high; now how did the man who put the top stone on get down, or, if ya force me up the vestibule, how did he get up in the first place? Even a canary couldn't balance himself on the darn thing, unless he had only one leg, an' then it'd look as if he lost his other spat.

For some time me an' Pop slipped the chatter back an' forth. What I don't know about kings ya could gossip off your pinky nail.

In those days the only thing a king had to do was plank himself in a stone seat so he could look over the desert an' wonder what all the sand was for. There he'd sit, squirtin' grape skins. Once in a while he'd catch somebody prowlin' around. When the guy was wheeled up in iron balls, the king would call for a sun dial an' say: "Look at what time it is! It's either morning or afternoon —in any case you're late. Come, come, an

DEAR SOOKY

answer—what, do you defy me!” If the bimbo dared to open his mouth he got beheaded before a wise-crack could start.

If it was a hot day an’ the king had to squirm around on the stone seat, waitin’ for an answer, he’d rumble up the desert: “Awayest, thou nit, an’ whittle up a quarry!”

Don’t talk to me about pyramids, no, sir, nor kings neither.

Affectionately sincere,

SKIPPY.



DEAR SOOKY:

I was sent to the empty room for talkin' back. I had to stand in the corner an' all ya could hear in the whole house was the clock tickin' like ya was bein' timed. It was rainin' all day an' I listened to the darn old splatter! splatter! splatter! on the window sill.

Once I heard laughin' downstairs so I made believe I was very funny an' told jokes to the wall, but I couldn't laugh with that rain drippin' outside; it made me feel that all the world was cryin'.

Then I got to thinkin' of the people who owed me letters, until I hate everybody. Why don't ya write to a feller? I wanted to sneak over to the window an' write my name on the glass, but then that'd be cheat-

DEAR SOOKY

in'; besides I wouldn't give *some* people that satisfaction.

Pretty soon mom comes an' asks me if I'm sorry. "For what?" I says. They was nothin' more said; I was just sent to my room, an' on the very day that the clocks was put back.

Up there nothin' happened. I tried to read a book only it was monotonous with so many big words. When it began to get dark, Nanny brought up some crackers an' milk. She talked to me like I wasn't a chair in the attic, an' just for that I'm goin' to buy her a hat when I get rich.

I sorta had a little fun makin' faces at myself in the mirror, but I don't think I'm as funny as I used to was, 'cause I didn't get a howl. Remember when I used to put the gang in stitches? No more, though.

There was voices under the window, so I creeps over for an earful an' who should



"It got to be so quiet I had to walk up an' down like a bandy-legged man  
an' make believe I was Mr. Gobbily-Wobbles."

DEAR SOOKY

it be but Somerset Gohagen an' Yacob. Somerset says, "I wuz!" an' Yacob says, "Ya wuzn't!" an' Somerset comes back: "I wuz!" "Wuzn't!" says Yacob. Well, they got to wuzzin' an' unwuzzin' until my foot goes to sleep. I went an' got a glass o' water an' let it splash. Somerset never moved, but Yacob beat it up the street an' Somerset yells: "I guess I know me own wuzzin'!"

If I could only begin to tell you how quiet it is in this room. It's quieter than still—or noisier than still, I dunno—'cause there's a funny little ringin' in my ears. Maybe I guess that ain't quiet! It got to be so quiet I had to walk up an' down like a bandy-legged man an' make believe I was Mr. Gob-bily-Wobbles, but I felt so silly that I was ashamed to turn on the light an' look at myself in the mirror.

How is it that a guy like Willy Wally can talk back an' do anythin' he wants to—

## DEAR SOOKY

maybe burn the house down. Anyway, every time he gets sent to his room, the fire engines seem to know about it, 'cause there's always a fire that night. An' no matter where the fire is, they pass his door. Where does he get his drag with the fire department? I don't even know one little fireman.

I was just about to hop into bed when somethin' flashed in my eyes. Gee, it took a nip outa my heart. I thought it was robbers first. I stood there as if I had icicles for supper, then I crept over to the window an' saw it was a search-light 'way in the distance. It shot up over the hills, clear an' sharp, an' 'way up on the other end was an aeroplane, like an eye in some giant's needle.

I just had to turn away 'cause I couldn't have felt any more hurt if that needle was stickin' in me—an' only because my tongue got to waggin' before I could stop it.

DEAR SOOKY

Well, I'm goin' to pray before I go to bed  
'cause I got to have somebody to talk to;  
I'm gettin' so tired of me. I guess if I was  
only a little pea, God would take me out of  
the crowd an' put me in a whistle.

Affectionately sincere,

SKIPPY.

DEAR SOOKY:

Well, it was the big night in the house to-night. One after the other of us took a bath, an' I thought I'd never get into the bathtub to sail my boat. That's the trouble with havin' company, ya don't have a bit of peace, nothin' but knocks on the door all the time.

I went down and turned the radio on an' some guy comes on with a voice like a cracked pot an' starts tellin' all about caterpillars. He says, "Now, listen, everybody, would you believe that if all the caterpillars should march in line, end to end, they would stretch from the Atlantic coast to the far Pacific coast." I turned those dials around like sixty—and for what? Just to hear a woman talkin' about the "little fledglings

## DEAR SOOKY

leaving their mama's nest." Around I go again only to hear what spinach is good for. Zingo goes the nozzles an' then I get the Marine Band. Oh, boy!—playing the Director's March, no less! That is, they played it, but I only heard the first bar because Pop yells, "Cut that off!" Well, there wasn't nothin' to do but cut it off.

I didn't feel like readin', an' was told never to wiggle match sticks in my ears, so I didn't know what to do. I looked at Pop, sittin' in the library an' heard him say to a fellow with a shoelace hangin' off his glasses, "Unbelievers are like a lot of apples in a pie—the only thing they look up to is the under side of the upper crust."

Well, it began to look as if I wasn't goin' to squirt the night away after all, so I listened. The man with the eye-glasses squeezes a lot of gulls over his forehead an' talks to Pop. After he gets through, Pop

## DEAR SOOKY

looks at him an' says, "People that look at the dark side of things do so because they're afraid of the light." Then Pop goes on, "Listen to me a minute. Life isn't so easy as you try to make it. A man who looks at the black side of things, after all, is an optimist." Then Pop takes a couple of tucks out of the man's coat lapels to keep him from fallin' down, an' I knew that somethin' was comin'. "Listen," Pop says, "my idea of an optimist is a man who believes that everything ends with the grave."

Well, here I am without a bit of homework done, but I think I'll go to school an' make believe I got white hair from overstudy. But if the teacher ever calls on me, I'll feel as bald as a dandylion that's got blowed on.

Affectionately sincere,

SKIPPY.



DEAR SOOKY:

Wait'll I tell ya! You'll never guess. I goes up in an aeroplane. Yes, sir! an aeroplane. Mr. Geepee knew someone who had a friend that knew a feller what worked around Commander Byrd's plane. Ya can see we was sittin' pretty. It wasn't long before Mr. Geepee says a pilot would take me up for an airin'.

Well, I gets in the plane an' it's a closed one. My heart began to beat when the motor gets singin'; pretty soon we starts. Faster an' faster we goes bicyclin' over the lawn, then all to a sudden I look out the window an' I see we're no longer on the ground. In no time no less we're goin' over backyards an' houses; straight up the kite line we go, until I see water right ahead an' before I

DEAR SOOKY

know it, there it is under us. Docks look like inch marks on a ruler.

Higher an' higher we buzz up the sky. We don't seem to be makin' any speed now, just sorta danglin' like a spider in the wind. I wobble up to the driver an' hold onto the back of his seat. "What's them things down there that look like cracker crumbs on a billiard table?" I asks. "Cattle!" he says. "— an' them match boxes full o' pepper?" "Freight cars full of coal!" he says.

"How far are we now?" I ask him.

"Six thousand feet," he says.

"Which way?" I ask.

"As an engine drops," he comes back.

I looked down an' my insides flutter like a cage o' canaries in a cat show. It was just as if I was lookin' at a page in the geography —nothin' but maps. Then I got to thinkin' of my homework. We begin to tilt an' there's the map right along side o' me; just

DEAR SOOKY

as if we was turnin' a page. All of a sudden—zingo! Underneath is an altogether different map.

Well, after we mosey around the pages, the driver starts carvin' pretzels in the air, then—Wingo! We drops like an elevator without a floor. I wanted to yell, but my mouth was full o' lungs. When he gets through bicycle playin' the sky, I begin to feel easier.

"We'll have to go down now 'cause I ain't so sure o' my gasoline," the driver says.

"Ain't so sure!" I says. "Why, how much ya got?"

"I dunno," he says, "the meter's busted an' I think I'm workin' on the reserve."

An' me without so much as a step ladder.

"When you drivers hop the ocean, how do ya tell time if your watch is bein' fixed?" I says.

"A pilot's got to know his astronomy."

DEAR SOOKY

"By stars, maybe, should I ask it?"

"No, we don't tell time so much by stars as by the spaces what fit between the stars," he says. "When it's black we know it's night, but when it gets grey, then we know it's time for breakfast."

All this time I never knew we was goin' down, but we was over house tops an' skid-din' toward a big dog house. Gee, sometime I'm goin' to tell you about this ride.

Oh, I've got the swellest collection of fence gates ya ever saw lined up for Hallowe'en. I hear Krausmeyer's goin' to get a new bread-box. I hope he doesn't disappoint us.

Affectionately sincere,

SKIPPY.

DEAR SOOKY:

Tonight I had to stay in an' do home work. You know the darned old stuff: "If *A* buys a peck of potatoes and sells a quart of them to *B*, how many potatoes has *A*?" This guy *A* is always buyin' potatoes; if his mother was croakin' *A*'d be out buyin' potatoes.

Anybody can write a book of questions, but show me the guy that'll sit down an' tear off a book o' nothin' but answers. Yeh! Show me the guy an' I'll let him buzz off my toothbrush.

Pop looked in on me. "Come on and get at your homework and stop that talking—always talking! Talking!"

I turned around an' looked at him, "Talk-

DEAR SOOKY

in' is it, papa, talkin'? Why, I am doin' homework!" I said, "I *am* doin' homework!"

He didn't say nothin' more an' turned away. Now, let's see where we were—oh, yes! A is out buyin' potatoes an' he sells B a quart. Why doesn't B go out an' buy his own potatoes? No, he's just makin' a sucker outa A. Besides, how do we know whether A got his money or not? Betcha they never thought o' that. Didn't I always tell ya I thought we ought to have oral arithmetic, then if a guy ain't battin' over the bleachers—call it a day an' let's sit down to tea, but no—no! Some one's got to sling the mustard or it wouldn't be life!

I looked at the clock, waitin' for it to strike nine so I could quit, 'cause I knew Pop wanted me to get some sleep. The hands just didn't seem to move so I thought, well, maybe there's somethin' in the back of

## DEAR SOOKY

the book that'll give us the low down on this guy A an' his potatoes. Anyway, it wouldn't do any harm to peek 'cause if the answer's right it's right, no matter where ya get it. So I flipped the pages way to the back—nothin' there. Maybe in the front—who knows? I goes to the front, but just as I thought—not s'much as a period, just a book of question marks. I was goin' to put the old book down an' turn to somethin' else when I see a picture. Hello! Who's this bimbo? I thought. Oh! the author—so that's the guy—the author! He had a pair of glasses on that looked like a bicycle, an' it says underneath the picture—

*Jules Peabody, Ph.D.*

"Ph.D.?" Ph? Ph?—Philip, I guess. D? D? Dan, maybe, I dunno, why should I? Well, I got to lookin' at him an' he

## DEAR SOOKY

looked like the kind of a guy that wouldn't know where to put middle initials. So right then an' there, I says, "Phil, don't ya know ya can't sprinkle initials on the ends? Even Somerset Gohagen knows better than that, an' he's been nailed to his seat in the first grade for five years. Ya haven't anythin' to say to me, have ya? Well, it serves ya right to get talked to this way. What did ya go writin' all them questions for? Wanted to get people roused up, didn't ya? Do ya know this book is bustin' up whole families?" Then I began to look him over very close. "Think that's smart, don't ya? Oh, you can smile, Phil," I says to him, "but a father an' son is passin' each other on the street today. I suppose ya thought ya was very smart gettin' up this book, huh, Phil? Well, do ya know what I think of it?" And I give him the tongue ploof, but I forgot my mouth was full of chocolate. Now, poor

DEAR SOOKY

Phil is all spluttered with freckles. Gee,  
what am I to do? Darn the Board of Edu-  
cation anyway!

Affectionately sincere,

SKIPPY.



DEAR SOOKY:

I felt mosey mosey all day; walked along the avenue an' it seemed like I was in a draft; it made me feel sorta naked without you an' Carol beside me.

I was makin' for the library to kill a couple o' hours, when who should I meet but Barrelhead Boynton. We squatted under the War Memorial an' Barrelhead's mouth begun to go like a fish tryin' to eat himself out of a bowl; he did nothin' but bup! bup! bup! bup! Pretty soon my ears begin to twitch when I heard somethin' about the army. I says: "Why go roun' coaxin' sparrows? Our army don't parade in bed sheets." He says: "Who's talkin' about our army? I'm speakin' about the Arabian army." I felt like a broken cork

DEAR SOOKY

in the ocean. Of course I nodded my head, but at the same time I gritted my teeth to keep from gettin' red in the face. I never felt so ignorant.

When he told me Arabia had millions o' square miles, I began to sniff government. He says: "How many people has Arabia got?" "Arabia? Now let me think," I says. Then he began to prattle in cow-trillions. You'd think he was addin' up the phone book. I wanted to argue, only my tongue got glued to my teeth. "Did I ever tell ya how Ammonia was made?" he says, an' then I begin to see the trees go whizzin' on a merry-go-round. I was just goin' to speak an' he says, "An adult is a person of full age—twenty-one years—men an' women both!" Ya couldn't shut the guy up. He chewed the fat about the Alps an' when he taped them off he starts juicin' about ants.



"As soon as he saw I was all friendness, he began to take  
interest in breathin' again."

## DEAR SOOKY

Well, anyway we got to discussin' Armenia; from there we go back to the Arabian army.

"What about the Arabian navy?" I peeped at him. He looks at me like he was frozen. "How's Benzine made?" I asked. He acts like a queen bee when the honey begins to curdle. He starts lookin' for four leaf clovers an' I crawl aside of him. "How many people in England? Scotland? Russia? Denmark?" I buzzed, "Or even Hartford, Connecticut?"

I followed him up with lefts an' rights until I had him saggin' over the ropes. When I see he was oozin' away I felt sorry. "How is it ya know everything that nobody ever heard about," I says, "an' ya don't know things that little children have to rattle off to get in kindergarden?"

As soon as he saw I was all friendness, he began to take interest in breathin' again.

DEAR SOOKY

"I'll tell ya!" an' he pulled grass up by the roots. "A man come to the house, sellin' books. He says all I had to do was give him fifty cents an' sign a card an' I would own a set of Iciclepeedyas. I only got one book and everything in it begun with "A."

He's goin' to get twenty-five more books 'cause the law says so; it serves him right for tamperin' with the government. I told him it'll be years before he'll ever suck a soda straw again. He said every once in a while the book showed elegant pictures, but I could see by the way he talked that his heart wasn't in it.

I just this minute put on my long under-wear. Christmas won't be long now.

Affectionately sincere,

SKIPPY.



DEAR SOOKY:

Last night I was just about to go to bed when I saw Pop playin' quoits with his smoke rings an' I knew he didn't have nothin' on his mind 'cause there's no talk about mortgages any more. Since he got an office by himself he goes down on the 9:34. It's causin' a lot of talk, him bein' a boss now.

When I see him whiffin' smoke so free an' easy, I knew the time come to show him the report card. Oh, if they was only laws to make teachers write in pencil, what a ball of taffy we'd be livin' on. I handed him the card an' got to dustin' off his coat. Then we batted out the old silence. My heart got tickin' so loud I couldn't catch my breath. Somethin' had to be done or I'd yell "Fire!"

## DEAR SOOKY

"Sooky's the only friend I got!"

I looked to see if the walls said it, but the mirror give me away.

Pop pinkyed the ashes off his cigar, took a long puff an' bupped out smoke rings. When he threw his head back, the look in his face made me feel I was balancin' the sky on a pompadour. "Why Sooky?" he asks.

"'Cause I feel it," I told him.

"Suppose I told you he wasn't," Pop says.

"I never would listen to anybody slittin' Sooky up the back 'cause he's my friend—I just know it," I says.

"I would rather hear those words," says Pop, "than gaze at the impossible—a perfect report card."

He fanned me with it to bring me to, I guess. He wipes the dew off his glasses an' looks me straight in the eye—so straight that I could feel he knew I needed a hair-cut

## DEAR SOOKY

behind me. He begins flippin' over the big book in his lap an' says: "Once upon a time there was a great Prince, who was very sad because he felt sorry for all the people that had to work and never got anything for it. He loved both men and animals an' got to wondering why there was so much sorrow in the world. Well, son, one night this Prince left all his wealth and went far away into the woods and there he thought and thought—"

"Didn't he call up the office or anythin' to say he wouldn't be in?" I asks. But Pop says: "A Prince don't have an office!" I was wonderin' if he wasn't scared to be in the woods all by himself with spiders an' lions all around maybe, but Pop says, "No—he was tryin' to figure out the best way to help everybody." Then he looked at me sharp, "Even little boys who don't get good marks on their report cards." I asked him

DEAR SOOKY

if the Prince had a little boy, an' he said, "Yes." So that settled the report card question.

"How long did this man think?" I asked, an' Pop said, "For days an' days, an' then one day he solved a great big arithmetic problem." I said, "He didn't copy from anybody, did he?" An' Pop says: "No! Smart men don't copy." An' he looked at me again an' I wished I hadn't made the crack.

"Where did this man come from, Pop?" I asked. "He came from the East," says Pop. "As far over as Second Avenue?" I said. "Oh, further than that." "Avenue A?" I says. Pop patted me on the back an' said, "You're getting warmer. Now if I tell you he came from 'way over the sea—over a long stretch of water, would you know where the East is?"

DEAR SOOKY

An' right like that, I says, "Yes—Astoria!"

"Well, no matter," Pop says, "Astoria or India, this man was right. His name was Buddha an' he lived two thousand years ago. He believed that every man carried a bit of Heaven in him an' when he gave it to the world it came back in friendship."

He kept talkin' an' talkin' an' the next thing I knew he was undressin' me an' helpin' me get into my pajamas. He showed me the half-Nelson again, too. Then he looks at me kinda steady an' says: "Remember that prayer, 'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild; Look upon a little child—'" an' I got red in the face an' said, "Oh, *that* was a long time ago—I say different prayers now." He grabbed me by the hand an' said, "A regular guy never gets too old for that prayer." So I said it for him.

Then he hooks me on the chin an' presses

DEAR SOOKY

his knuckles against my jaw an' says, "You'll be a regular guy or you'll get *that!*" So I comes back with a right hook an' says: "An' you'll be a regular guy, Pop, or you'll get *that!*"

He goes out the door an' smiles back an' says: "I see that the Babe knocked out his fiftieth homer today."

Sometimes, Sook, I feel awful sorry that you ain't got an old man. What's the difference—you can have mine when him an' me ain't speakin'. Not for keeps, though.

Affectionately sincere,

SKIPPY.

DEAR SOOKY:

The cop was lookin' all over for me today, so I hid in the Public Library; to keep out of sight I held a book up to my face. When a man kept crowdin' me up against the corner, my forehead began to get dewy; any minute I thought he'd take a squint over the top of the book. There was no more chance of me gettin' away than honeysuckle runnin' out on a starvin' bee. It's gettin' so I don't know who I'm goin' to run into any more, an' from now on I'll find out who lives in the houses before I break another window. Well, the upshot of the whole thing was that I had to read to kill time.

The story was about one of them kings again, an' it didn't take more than the first

DEAR SOOKY

line to find out they was worser than cops. I flopped into the story an' found out that this king had a very important dream, only he forgot what it was about, so what does he do but whistle for his wise men. They come easin' up to the throne almost trippin' over their beards. When he got through sputterin' grapes over them, he says: "Terpretate the dream I had last eventide an' give us the meanin' whereof! Look smart!"

The foreman of the wise men did make answer to the royal gazabo: "Oh, Monark of Monarks, 'tis thoun who must make known to us'n the dream whereas."

"Don't tiz with me!" says the king. "And I ain't to be took in by a lot of where-asin'. Come, the dream! Look smart!"

Now the wise men was up against it, an' make believe they didn't know it; here was one tough majesty that'd call out the navy for so much as a "'tiz.'" All mornin' they

## DEAR SOOKY

squeezed up telescopes an' tiddled around with every tool known to wise men, but try as they might, not so much as a terpre-tation come of it.

They knew they was stuck, an' to gain time they asked the king for a teeny-weeny inkling of the dream. What a dirty meany His Majesty turned out to be!

"I can't be bothered rememberin' these dreams," he says. "Unless forth comes the dream by yonder sun dip, I will behead the kingdom, but hold ye! Should it come to pass that the dream be unriddled, I will give a palace to each and every wise man that ever snooted up a book."

The wise men woggled their eyes at one another like they was gulpin' castor oil. With their knees chatterin', they listened to the king: "I should fester away with barnacles from a solid gold throne, waitin' for terpretations, when answers should click

## DEAR SOOKY

like lion's teeth on the groins of a baby lamb!  
Men like you who get learned off the stars  
could have no higher learnin'."

The king paused to sneeze in an ermine handkerchief an' up spoke the foreman: "Oh, great an' mighty Ruler, Monark of Monarks an' then some, there exists in the kingdom one, yeh, even one with greater wisdom than thouest beholdens before you —one with higher learning."

"Whittle thy song! Name the man with higher learning!" commands the king.

" 'Tis the shepherd of the lowest valley,  
who gazeth at even farrer stars."

In no time they all got the shepherd to the palace. When he heard that the king was on a beheadin' tear, he made a try to unriddle the dream. He drops before him like a man huntin' for a collar button an' right away he starts to work on the king.

"Last eventide Your Majesty dreamed,

## DEAR SOOKY

and in deep slumber up pops a vision so vast  
that only the mind of a very great king  
could hold it. Follow me?"

His Majesty leaned forward and propped  
his beard in his hands, like spinach in a  
platter of warm butter. "Go on!" he oozed.

"In your dream you saw a statue in the  
desert; the head was made of rubies an' the  
eyes was of diamonds. Thine locks were of  
sapphire an' thine body was made of solid  
gold. This was put up by the angels of  
Heaven in honor of all your great deeds an'  
because you were givin' the kingdom a  
break. Stop me if I'm wrong, King."

This was no more the king's dream than  
a fish has hoofs, but being that the king was  
nobody's catspaw, an' knowin' that the joy-  
ful gossip would spill over into other king-  
doms an' start trouble, he took the dream  
unto hisself. So pleased was the king that  
he began slingin' away jewels like a farmer

## DEAR SOOKY

sowin' wheat. "This is on the house," he says.

That night the king got to broodin' himself for squirtin' away his riches, an' before he knows it he bats out some slumber with a dream in the middle of it. When he woke up he remembered the dream an' yells: "Fetch hither yon jackass of a shepherd!"

In a jiffy they wheeled in the sheep herder an' right away he guessed the dream right; it seemed His Majesty dreamt that he ordered everybody in the land beheaded, an' the executioner, not darin' to disobey His Royal Highness, beheaded also the king.

"Wrong!" howls the king, "Wrong! wrong! To the dungeons—"

That's as far as I got because the librarian took the book away. She said it was reserved for the man that was hangin' over me. Anyway I could hear Pop 'way off in the distance: "Supper on the table! Sup-

DEAR SOOKY

per on the table!" Just when I get my chewin' gum goin' nice, I got to eat.

Affectionately sincere,

SKIPPY.



## DEAR SOOKY:

Aunt Emily finally brought up the man she's engaged off, an' I sat next to him at dinner. I don't think he had a handkerchief with him 'cause when everybody wasn't lookin' he mopped his face with the napkin. I sized him up as the kind of a guy that'd dunk in your soup when ya wasn't lookin'.

Oh, but that ain't the worst of it! I giggled right out when we said grace. I hope I'll be forgiven. When this fellow bent his head down, his back collar button flipped out an' his collar goes over his head, like he had the mumps.

You know how pretty Aunt Emily is, an' I was awfully surprised. I think we all was, only I showed it more. I could of dug up a better guy for Aunt Emily down in the

## DEAR SOOKY

car shops an' I wouldn't have to go scurryin' around either.

We all sat around the drawing-room after an' Pop fiddled with the radio. The fellow that's time-scorer came on an' told us in one minute it'd be eight o'clock. We all got set like a relay race, everybody with their watches out, an' when the gong sounded we all set them—except Pop. He was awful disappointed 'cause his was already just eight o'clock. After that there was nothin' to do. We were all set with no place to go. Everybody looked at everybody else, so ya couldn't settle down to a tooth pick. At last Rudolph said, "Oh, Emily, did you show them your ring?" An' Aunt Emily said, "Oh, didn't I show it to you before? Isn't it *beautiful?*"

Mom says, "That's a real blue an' white," an' Pop says, "It's a regular trolley light." I struck a match an' took a look at it.

## DEAR SOOKY

Well, after I was sent up to my room I could hear Rudolph singin' downstairs, "Should Old Acquaintance Be Forgot," an' I thought to myself, "Any guy that would whittle a pin-head an' call it a diamond *ought* to be forgot."

An' I guess I wasn't far wrong 'cause they went very short after an' Pop put his head in the door. He doesn't say nothin' but his mouth goes up one side an' then the other, like a see-saw jugglin' two crescent moons. "Come on, big boy," he says, "I feel like a comedy tonight. Let's go up to the Orpheum."

I said, "All right, Pop, but the sodas are on me." So I goes over to the Sunday School barrel an' starts shakin' it, but ya couldn't hear a thing. Pop said, "What! Nothing in the Sunday School barrel?" I got red in the face. It looked like the Orpheum was beginnin' to fade away. He

DEAR SOOKY

said, "Do you mean to tell me you've been borrowing out of that?" An' I said, "Well, I'll tell you how it is, Papa. I've got a list of everything I've taken out," an' I went over an' fished the list out from under the carpet. It didn't take him long to see that I was givin' the Church a break even if I was a little behind in my payments.

Anyway, he put all the money back in the barrel right out of his own pocket an' even a quarter more! I'm goin' around tomorrow morning an' give all the money in to the minister, though, 'cause you ought to see the whistles that Barkenteen's have in now. Only yesterday I woulda had one of them very whistles. No more, though.

Affectionately sincere,

SKIPPY.

DEAR SOOKY:

I'm up at Grandma's an' every Friday night the band practises in the Town Hall, so tonight me an' all the fellers went up. There's about fifteen in the band, an' most of them was there 'ceptin' the big horn; he couldn't come or somethin'—I dunno. They pull out the big long meetin' benches to make a square around the stove. Pretty soon everybody gets tootin' up ready to bust when the drummer beats for order. "There's no head and there's no tail to this band," he says, "an' there's no need for a leader whizzin' up a brass cane. So what one says we all say, or we don't say.

"Now what I got to say before the band is this: Next Friday night we can get hired

DEAR SOOKY

out at Blazer Falls to play for the barn dance; they're willin' to give us a dollar apiece. Seems as how I'd like to hear what us has to say about this. Should we ought to go, or should we oughtn't to?"

"Well, I don't know," says the Piccolo. "Seems as if we ain't ready for socials yet, 'cause we ain't got uneeforms."

"Well," says the Drummer, "I looked into the uneeforms an' I got wrote to by a band house, an' I found out that red coats with sky rockets goin' up the back seams is \$14.00 apiece. Gold shoulder drippin's is extra."

"That's all very well," says the Piccolo, "but we can't play at a dance without pants."

"Well, why can't we get the coats?" says the Trombone, "an' use these here pants we got?"

"'Cause the band ain't got a whole pair

## DEAR SOOKY

o' pants between us," says the Piccolo. "If we get up on that there stage we'd look like a bed quilt."

"Don't forget, there's another thing," says the Cornetster. "They's none of us here can play 'The Green Mountain Volunteer' nor 'The Boston Fancy,' an' I don't see how they're goin' to reel off to 'The Old Oaken Bucket.' "

"Well, if they know their steps, it doesn't matter what music we peel off so long as 'tain't too fast," says the Drummer, "some on us can always get some sort o' time."

"Well, we're here for practicin'," says the Piccolo, "ain't we? What are we goin' to play?"

"Connecticut March," says the Trombone.

"That's too good for Connecticut," says the Piccolo.

"Well, no matter," says the Drummer,

DEAR SOOKY

"let's go through with it oncst, an' if it is, it's easy enough to change Connecticut for New Hampshire," an' before anybody could get a sip of a horn, he starts rollin' up the drum.

The band is all sizes and ages, from seven to seventy-five years old, an' while the Drummer is clatterin' away, they squeeze up their faces lookin' for the notes. Finally, they all get to blowin' away until the windows in the Hall begin to rattle. They get playin' so loud that you can't tell whether it's flat or it's music. Then up jumps the Trombone, swingin' his horn like a hammer thrower, yellin' himself purple in the face. After awhile some empties the spit out o' their horns, wonderin' what the rest of the tootin' is for. The Trombone howls out: "Them little dots ain't notes! They's punctuations." The Drummer only rattle-tattles the harder till it sounds like a pan o'

DEAR SOOKY

dishes rollin' down the stairs. When his arms gives out he listens to the Trombone.

The Drummer is the oldest in the band an' used to be a drummer in the Civil War. He says he never read off'n notes, 'cause the only notes he ever got learned offa was cannon balls, an' there was enough o' them between the lines. One feller says he oughta get 'quainted with the little black eggs on the paper lines, but the Drummer sniffs it off an' says the little black eggs on the ends of his drumsticks were good enough for the Civil War, an' he guessed they'd have to do for the band. With that he busts out into a double roll an' gives the band the tooth-suck.

Affectionately sincere,

SKIPPY.



DEAR SOOKY:

This morning I took a book under my arm an' started for the woods; it was just that elegant an' warm out that no one would ever believe it's the end of November. Walkin' through the woods I had to stop to take in the sunbeams drippin' through the trees. After that, I plowed on, shufflin' up yellow leaves, bright as glitterin' coins. If they was all gold, I thought, I'd be the richest man in the world. Even if they was, I couldn't be any happier. Besides, I had a chocolate almond bar tucked away in my back pocket.

Never was it so quiet before, only bird calls you could hear. For a long time I

looked up at the sky so high an' blue; it set me to thinkin' that if the world was upside down an' I ever lost my footin', I'd swish through tree-tops an' then go twirlin' in emptiness forever an' ever. So stiller an' beautifuler it got, with trees an' trees as far as I could see, that I couldn't go stampin' an' cracklin' up the forest any more. It was like breakin' the bric-a-brac on an altar.

I squatted in a bed of pine needles, an' somehow or other got to thinkin' about God. Lookin' all around me I couldn't help but see what a swell job he made of Nature. Even at that, I didn't want to pass on it without some sort of a tussle, so I began findin' fault right an' left. Supposin' I had nothin' on my mind but putterin', what would I do if somebody handed me a whole lot of nothin' full of blue sky? I began to mull the ball over in my mind an' the more I thought, the more I began to agree with



*"Lookin' all around me I couldn't help but see what  
a swell job God made of Nature."*

God. It got so you couldn't tell our work apart. No use talkin', Sook, it was the very same kind of a job I'd turn out. No, sir, I wouldn't even put one more notch in a leaf.

It was just the kind of day that only me an' God would be out in, so I made up a game. I was to ask him questions an' he was to answer them if he could. I started off, "God, why do you put limbs on the trees?" An' I was sure I heard him say, "So squirrels'll find their way around." That didn't seem like the right answer to me, but I didn't dare argue with God. Anyway, I was raisin' my voice an' scarin' the chipmunks. Then I kept very quiet an' tried to imagine myself as the only one left in the whole world, an' I began to fill up. All around me I noticed dead leaves was fallin' an' fallin' without a sound. Silent they come down with a gentle dip on one side an' a floatin' on the other—dippin' an' floatin' they was,

DEAR SOOKY

until they pattered on the ground. Maybe they was snugglin' to make a quilt so's the world would be warm till Spring. Well, sizin' it all up, I figured winter was comin' with a bang.

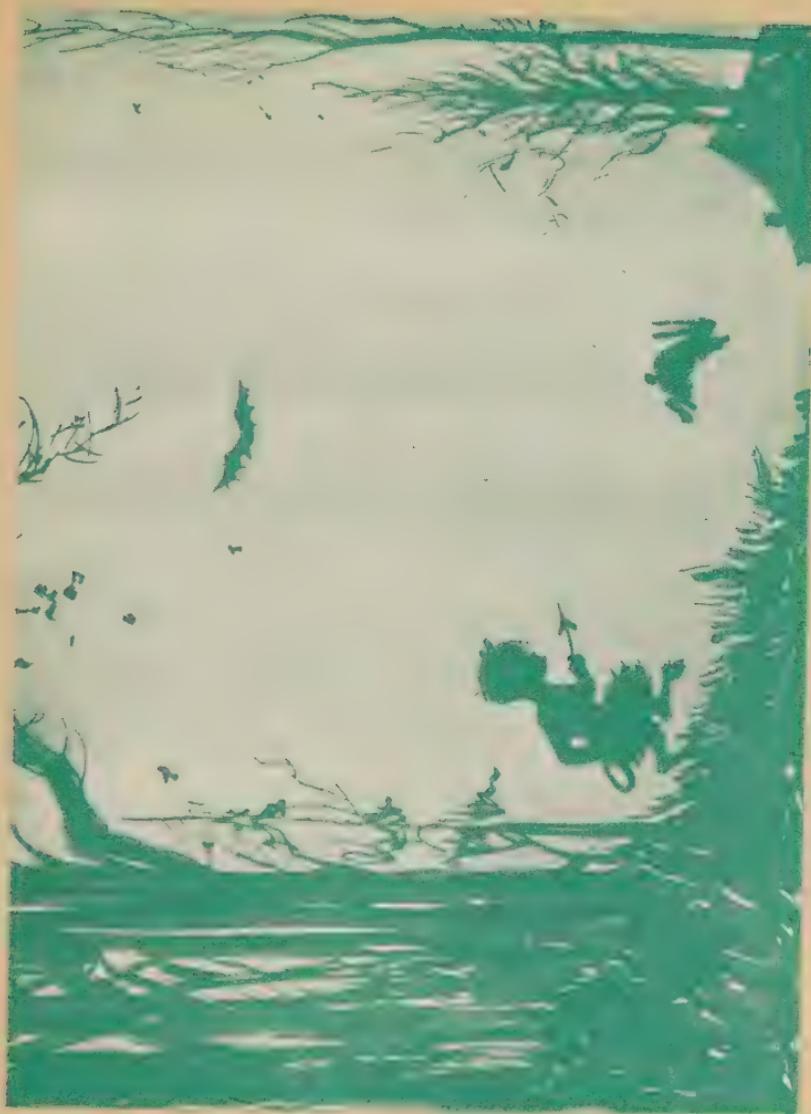
For the first time I looked at the book I had an' I see it was the "Scarlet Letter." I just felt like readin' a football story, only I opened it up an' sees pictures of pilgrims. I flipped the pages to another picture—more pilgrims. What kind of a story is this, I thought. Whoever heard of pilgrims havin' a team. Well, I started readin' anyway; I didn't want it said that I never gave a book a break.

It was about a little girl named Pearl, who wouldn't come to her mother 'cause she ripped a letter off her chest an' threw it in the brook. I figured that the mother must have been a basketball player, an' perhaps she was throwin' down her team. There

## DEAR SOOKY

was a minister who tried to put his two cents worth in, too, an' I thought they'd never finish theein' an' thouin'. You had to hand it to the kid, though, she made her mother put the letter back on again.

You couldn't help but like Pearl, sailin' her little birch-barks an' playin' around; it said she was an elf child. That got me to thinkin' an' bang goes the book. What an elf I'd make, rompin' through the woods, pawin' up the earth everywhere I dug my toe-nailed feet. Think of the fur on my legs pompadoured an' glossy, an' me flittin' through the trees with a harp-whistle to my mouth, scatterin' animals an' flutterin' birds. An' then at night when it was all very dark, I'd peek out of the woods to see if anybody was still up on the farms. With only stars for lanterns I'd make whistle sounds that'd drive wild animals slinkin' to their caves. Outa the woods I'd go pussy-



"What an elf I'd make, rompin' through the woods, pawin' up the earth. . . ."

## DEAR SOOKY

tiptoein' down to the village, sendin' all the dogs into the kennels with their tails between their legs, too scared to bark 'cause they knew Pan was out, an' he wasn't meanin' no good when he blew moanful little whistle howls that made children put their heads under the covers. They'd know that the very fiercest elf was at the grindstone, sharpenin' up his spear tail an' makin' it so very pointed that all them wild animals would wish they was never born 'cause he'd be comin' back into the forest, ready to rouse up lions an' tigers. I was thinkin' of this an' I got scared of myself, I was that terrible.

Just then I got the fright of my life. A squirrel crashed through the woods right before me. Without thinkin' I reached for my tail, but the elf was gone! I knew then it was no use stayin' in the forest unarmed an' I ran home like anything, leavin' yellow

DEAR SOOKY

leaves flyin' after me, like feathers in a pillow fight.

Affectionately sincere,

SKIPPIE.



DEAR SOOKY:

They wasn't nothin' to do after supper 'cept meander up to the Post Office and watch the postmaster play solitaire with left over mail. He looked at me over his glasses when the bell over the door tinkled me in. He never pays any more attention to me than to a draft comin' through the keyhole.

Almost every night ya can find someone hangin' over the coal scuttle, but tonight there wasn't a soul sittin' around. I picked up the snow prints I tracked in an' let them fizz on the stove. Then I opened the stove door an' put my hands before the hot coals to see how near I could come without gettin' burnt. When it got so I had to stand on one foot an' then the other, I cut it out. Sometimes ya can stand more near than

DEAR SOOKY

other sometimes. Oh, well, anyway—I like to look at the hot coals an' spit on them; spit makes such a funny noise when it gets lost. That's the life up here; ya spit the winter away an' summer ya fill up on bird calls. And yet, the people is very lovely.

The door starts ting-a-lingin' an' in walks Orion Hughes, the church janitor's son. He's one of sixteen kids the father has—an' the mother, too, of course. Everybody around here knows that the government gives them a pension for having sixteen children. At first it caused a lot o' jealousy until fourteen of them was taken down with the measles all at oncst.

Orion comes right over to me an' hands me a great big apple. I knew he never expected to see me there an' was goin' to eat it himself. Everybody that knows Orion, though, has him down as a guy that gives away everything that he has—an' that ain't

## DEAR SOOKY

much 'cause the little money he does make sawin' up cord-wood, he turns over to his father. There's somethin' awful girlish about the guy—maybe it's 'cause his voice is so soft. Then he looks at you so timid sorta; keeps dartin' his head in an' out of a great big coat, like a chipmunk afraid to come out an' play. But don't get rollin' up your sleeves an' feelin' mussy 'cause this Orion ain't no weak sister.

Well, I took a bite outa the apple an' then gave him half of my jelly beans. After that we got very chummy. He sorta come out of himself when he saw that I had all friendness about me, an' showed me some fish hooks that he had in his pockets. Ya could see that the worms was never used—one was almost, so there must be fish around somewhere.

I had nothin' to show, an' anyway I was tryin' to figure out the smell of the store.

DEAR SOOKY

'At first I was goin' to put it down as bacon, but I knew it was my eyes that was bein' took in; then I thought of lamp shades, but they don't smell. Kerosene oil got a vote, until I looked at all the overalls an' lumber jackets hangin' over the counter. It was gettin' me a little dippy, so I put it down as woolly, ropey, lampy, stale crackery all mixed up in a pudding, an' let it go at that.

I opened up the stove door an' for a long time we looked at the fire. Then we walked over to the door an' stood blowin' our breaths on the glass an' listenin' to the sleigh bells. From that moment on, conversation began to stir.

I asked him if he believed in Santy Claus an' he said yes he did, 'cause he believed in God, an' God made Santy Claus. He listened to all the things I was goin' to get for Christmas—anyway all the things I asked for—but when I got through he never said

## DEAR SOOKY

nothin', just blew on the glass an' rubbed it out with his finger again. I asked him what he was goin' to get an' he said he hoped he'd get glasses so that he wouldn't stub his toes so much, walkin' home at night. I said: "Where does glasses come in with stubbin' your toes?" An' he said that he never told nobody for a long time 'cause he was afraid they'd kid him, but he couldn't see very well. He told me he kept it a secret until one time he came home with a bloody nose an' his father licked him 'cause he thought he was fightin'. It was really because he fell down.

I found out that Orion don't like to ask for nothin', not even at Christmas time. "Well," I says, "how about these glasses—are they goin' to get them for ya?" He said he thought so, but there were so many things they had to buy, his father hated to buy knick-knacks, but he said he supposed

DEAR SOOKY

he'd have to 'cause twice already Orion had spilled the milk pail, an' losin' the milk would cost more in the end.

I didn't know what to say, but under my breath I told God he could take all my toys if he'd only give Orion the glasses. First I was goin' to say half my toys, but I was afraid God might not like it 'cause I was holdin' back.

The cat came purrin' an' rubbin' against my legs so I picked him up an' says, "How much do ya think he weighs?" Orion says, "Put him on the scales an' let's see." The postmaster must have heard Orion's voice 'cause he came out. I guess he didn't know Orion was there before. He says to him, "When's your father goin' to pay that bill?" Orion's face gets a terrible shame red on it an' he looks at me like he wants me to go. "Ya needn't come around here askin' for any more trust till that bill is paid," the

## DEAR SOOKY

postmaster says, an' Orion looks at the floor as if he could never look anyone in the face again. It's the first time in my life, Sook, that I ever put my arms around a guy's shoulder. I just whispered in his ear, "Orion, don't forget to look in on me Christmas morning—I've got somethin' for ya." Then I see he had a lot of explainin' to do, so I sneaked out. But I banged the door so hard that I nearly knocked the bell off, an' when the postmaster frowned at me, I stuck my fingers to my nose, just to show him that I had other places to go.

Gee, I'll have to go up for the mail tomorrow an' I don't know what to do about it. Oh, speakin' about trouble. I forgot to tell ya. Grandpa hurt his foot fearful an' he can't go out. Sometimes I think he's glad 'cause he's so contentful when he can just sit an' rock in the kitchen, an' smoke an' wonder when the next meal's comin'. Grandma

DEAR SOOKY

don't let him get off too easy, though, 'cause oncst in a while he has to peel potatoes—only most of the time he's readin' the paper an' sippin' up his pipe. When he begins to look like somethin' in the zoo, Grandma calls in the barber. This mornin' he was shavin' Grandpa in the kitchen when Grandma comes in. She says, "Tom Skinner, take that stove cloth off your neck."

When Grandma found out that it was the towel the barber brought with him, she suddenly thought of all the beds she had to make an' ran upstairs.

Affectionately sincere,

SKIPPY.

DEAR SOOKY:

I'm still in the mountains up at Grandma's, an' all a feller can do up here is go tobogganin' or skatin', an' talk about tobogganin'! Late yesterday afternoon I pulled my sleigh up the mountain, an' gee, it was beautiful! All quiet, an' 'way off in the distance, miles an' miles away, purple mountains bumped against the sky. Clouds circled around farrer an' farrer, like ripples in a pool after a stone's been plopped in.

I go moseyin' along, chewin' the pine needles. Almost all the pines is white pines. Ya can tell a white pine 'cause it gets growed in a sheaf o' five needles. It looks like a hand to me, an' I got studyin' it, an' I wonders if a feller has as many friends as that. I mean friends that'd stick by a guy. I

DEAR SOOKY

counted off the first needle, an' that was you, Sook. Then I counted the rest of the real guys I know, an' it made four, an' one for Carol just made five. Maybe that's why they call it white pine, 'cause every one of them needles is friends. Then I pass on an' see the red pine. They has two needles on a sheaf an' look like fangs, so I thought of enemies, but I just chucked it away, 'cause what's the use of botherin' with red pines when the whole mountain is filled with white pines. 'Tain't worth thinkin' about, I said to myself. Then, wingo! My heart turned to a snowball, 'cause a mess o' partridges whirred by in front of me an' rumbled through the trees with a noise like a thousand butter tubs tumblin' down the carpet stairs.

When you get away up on the mountain the village seems like a lot o' doll houses down below, an' the horses an' sleighs

## DEAR SOOKY

hitched to the general store look like ants playin' with a spider. Well, off I starts, steerin' the old flier through the pines. I goes whizzing down an' there before me is the fields of snow, glimmerin' in gold an' purple, beautifuler than a fairy's wing. An' away below, the lake stretches out like a sheet of tin . . . then I gets to thinkin' it ain't been tried out yet, an' it may hold me, an' then again it mayn't. It wasn't no time to go wonderin' 'cause before I know it I'm skippin' clean across it.

Coastin' is all I have to do up here except skate, but every Saturday night we have the movies, an' the whole town goes. The old men sit on the right, an' the old women on the left. Right down in the front is the kids. There's only a couple of girls in the village. An' 'way in the back is all wood-cutters in checker-board shirts, spittin' up an acquaintance with each other.

DEAR SOOKY

The first thing the movie shows is pictures of forest fires an' what the blister rust does to the pines. The movies get this for nothin', an' then they show you how whole forests gets took on fire, only it's the same forests every week.

The main picture's nothin' like the movies we have. I never seen such actors in all my life! You can hardly see 'em, it's always rainin' so hard in the picture. They play a phonograph over an' over. If the picture is a battle scene or a mardy grass it makes no difference. They just keep repeatin', "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean." While it's playin' a guy fiddles to keep up with the record. It ain't long before he falls behind, so we have two Bonnies Lie Over the Ocean. Then he gets sneakin' up on the record, an' before you know it he's galloped past it an' you still get two Bonnies. They just don't seem to be able to hit it off to-



"Toys, Dolls, Pads, and artickles too numerous to mention."

## DEAR SOOKY

gether. An' all of a sudden, Plowie! the picture busts, leavin' you like you was in a tunnel lookin' out ahead at nothin' but sky. Then all of a sudden comes Jim's ad: "Toys, Dolls, Pads, and artickles too numerous to mention." Then off goes the record an' the fiddler starts "Halleluia." This costs Jim 35 cents a night with awkestra accompnament. Then on goes the picture again, whizzin' down like a guy slippin' off the mountain. Just as you begin to get some idea of what the picture is about, Snappo! —you get Jim's ad again an' "Halleluia." The only person that gets anything out of the movies is Jim.

Oh, but the comedy's funny! More hittin' an' chasin' around! Everybody eats a bag of popcorn, an' as soon as the comedy comes on, they all gets to laughin' an' sputterin' popcorn until the whole place looks like a blizzard.

DEAR SOOKY

Well, Sook, I'm comin' home pretty soon,  
an' don't forget to tell the gang I'm still  
captain. Any guy that says I ain't gets a  
sock in the nose.

Affectionately sincere,

SKIPPY.



DEAR SOOKY:

It's two below zero up here an' the lake's tighter than a drum. It's a good thing we all shut the water off 'cause durin' the night it went to fifteen below zero. I asked Grandpa how cold that was an' he said, " 'Tweren't no time for honeysuckle."

There's a stove in my room so before I went to bed, I put in a big piece o' wood. When it got to cracklin', it was time for me to blow out the lamp an' hop into bed. For a long while I just lay awake lookin' at the firelight suck up the shadows in the room. Only Grandma was up, gettin' her last minute knittin' done 'cause tomorrow was Christmas. Everything was so quiet that I could hear the train whistle far off an' it

DEAR SOOKY

made me wish that Pop would come then instead of the next morning.

The church is only a short distance from the house, an' I could hear the organ playin' "Little Town of Bethlehem." As soon as the people started singin', warm little shivers chased up an' down my back. I got up on my knees an' looked out the window; the light from the church tickled the snow with gold. I kept starin' over the steeple at the mountains far away, wonderin' if Santy Claus an' his reindeers would whiz across the sky.

I must have been blinkin' a long time 'cause the music stopped. All ya could hear was the pines swishin' with the wind, an' moanin' 'cause they couldn't go places. The organ started again an' then a woman sang, "Silent Night, Holy Night." It was so much like my mother's voice that I almost stopped breathin'; I could have sweared that

## DEAR SOOKY

she was callin' me, only the words was 'way, 'way off, an' yet like they was bein' whispered in my ear—"All is calm, all is bright." —She'd say it so anyway, I know her that well, but everything ain't all bright 'cause why am I up here an' not in my own house?

Last Christmas was so different. Mom an' Pop tucked me in bed an' stood over me until I rattled off my prayers; they always kept the light burnin' low in case robbers got the drop on me. Now nobody cares whether I keep the light up or not—kerosene lamps, the disgusting,iggily things. Who cares if I say my prayers up here? No wonder I'm away behind. Somethin' must be the matter, 'cause all supper talk is spelled out whenever I get to listenin'.

Maybe it was the organ, makin' me so sadful, but while I was on my knees I thought I'd catch up on prayin'; before I knew it, I dropped on the bed an' blubbered like a

DEAR SOOKY

kid—me, no less, can you imagine? I was afraid Grandma would come in any minute an' catch me; right away I jabbed the corners of my eyes as fierce as I could. When I looked up, the moon was over the mountain, like a mouth laughin' silver all over the sky. It even giggled up the stripes of the carpet. I got to wonderin' . . . supposin' the full moon was a coin an' I bought a million dollars worth o' jelly beans, how much change would I get, an' if I didn't get any, how would I know I wasn't cheated? It got me so roused up that I couldn't sleep.

I started makin' change an' my head got so full of noughts that I must have fell asleep 'cause I dreamt of haloes. It seemed I was walkin' through rooms of silver an' gold an' they was so big there wasn't any walls, an' if there wasn't no walls, how could there be a ceilin'—so ya can see how big a place I was in. I got skatin' around the clouds an'

## DEAR SOOKY

who do ya think I ran into—the guy that was drowned last summer. I said, "Where did ya cop the chicken feathers?" I no sooner made the crack than an old man with a white nightgown an' wings yells out: "Here, here, none of that talk up here!" An' his voice bumbles an' bumbles all over the sky. Wherever I sailed, I could hear him thunderin' after me, "Tell your dog these haloes are not dog-collars." All of a sudden I went bustin' through emptiness an' I must have punctured a cloud 'cause I could feel the rain in my face. It woke me up an' there was the dog lickin' my nose. I let him come under the covers, only he tunnels down to my toes an' starts sippin' away at them. He's only a pup an' too young to get learned better. Anyway he knew it was Christmas morning an' I ought to be up an' doin'. The next minute I was down the banisters an' divin' into all my toys.

DEAR SOOKY

Pop came stampin' in just when the turkey was took out of the oven, an' even before he got his things off, it was all Grandma could do to keep him from pickin' off the crust. I said, "Here! Here! None of that," an' Grandma turned an' slapped my hand off the plum puddin'.

After dinner me an' Pop played with toys all by ourselves, an' while we was cuttin' up I turned on the radio, but Pop stopped me. He took me in his lap an' said, "Son, this is one day when we can leave all that behind. Last night I passed Union Square an' I'll never forget the sound of a radio horn blaring across the park, spitting a Chopin waltz for blocks." He kept pokin' his thumb nail between the cracks of the teeth an' looked out the window, all the time smoothin' out my knees. Then he says, "But I suppose we've got to have American progress." With that he dumps me on the

DEAR SOOKY

floor an' starts thumbin' up the old organ  
like he was lost an' was tryin' to crowd back  
into yesterday again.

I got the elegant Christmas card from you  
an' Carol this morning. I could see you went  
fifty-fifty on it 'cause I took it right up to  
Jim's to get it priced, an' he said it was worth  
every bit of two cents.

Affectionately sincere,

SKIPPIE.



DEAR SOOKY:

Today I was out all alone skatin' on the lake an' I felt like a flea on a window-pane. There wasn't nothin' to do but scribble on the ice, only when I got through, the curley-cues didn't read nothin'. It got me to thinkin' at the time, I'd like to do homework that way—if I was a good skater. The only trouble is that the teacher would have to come out an' look it over 'cause I couldn't bring the lake into school.

Some places where you go over the ice it rumbles like thunder an' ya can't tell where. I guess it's because air gets underneath it. Anyway, that's what somebody said, I think. It sorta scares you, but 'tain't nothin' to worry about. One place I was goin' like sixty an' the ice cracked as I went over

DEAR SOOKY

it. I looked all over the lake, but I couldn't find the spot again.

I moseyed around an' happened to think of my chewin' gum so I fished it out from back of my ear an' got to chewin'. It was just too lovely lookin' at the sun set back of the mountain. They were very dark purple against the gold sky. A large plushy cloud was just over my head, sprayin' gold all around its edges. It was all so beautiful starin' at the mountains rollin' an' rollin' far off, that I forgot I left myself standin' in the middle of the lake. Remember when I used to say nothing could be eleganter than Dusenberry's slippery postcards? Well, I'm beginnin' to change my mind. The pine trees around the edge of the lake were so very dark green that birch trees looked like frozen lightning.

Everything was all so still an' quiet that I felt empty inside an' terrible sad happy out-

## DEAR SOOKY

side. It was like you was lookin' at your thoughts turned inside out while the church organ's playin'. I never felt so happy before as I went buzzin' around the lake. It wasn't the kind of happiness that you get when you take a soda, or the kind when your mouth is dribblin' with chocolate almonds. It was too different for that. It was like God fitted up a great big playroom for me an' I was makin' myself at home.

When I got back to the house supper was on the table, an' what I didn't do to the beans. Grandpa cornered the sugar bowl when Grandma wasn't lookin', and dumped sugar into his coffee. Grandma says, "Tom Skinner, it's just wicked the way you leave the sugar in the bottom of your cup; no wonder our grocery bill last month was nine dollars an' fifty-two cents." Grandpa unhooked his glasses an' wiped the steam off with his napkin. He looks into the cup as if

DEAR SOOKY

expectin' to see a pyramid of sugar stickin' out of it. "Let me tell you one thing, Ma," he says, "you can't say that about me because this morning I gave my coffee one hell of a stirring."

It was a good chance for me to sneak out, besides I couldn't see the last hours of the year slippin' away without bein' spent somehow. So I gallop up to Jim's. The first thing I saw when I went in was the fifteen-cent necktie I give him for Christmas. There it was in his very show-case, only it was marked a quarter.

Affectionately sincere,

SKIPPY.

DEAR SOOKY:

I was up at the hospital all day today, an' somehow or other I couldn't play when I came out. I even passed Krausmeyer's an' he looked different to me, so different that before I could stop myself, I said, "How do ya do, Mr. Krausmeyer, it's a nice day." An' ya could have knocked me over with a feather if he didn't say, "Hello, Skippy." I felt sure he was goin' to throw me an apple, but somethin' stopped him. Maybe it was because there was all good ones on top.

Anyway, here I am tonight over my arithmetic an' I don't hate it like other nights. Not that I'm doin' it—I just can't get at it, thinkin' of all that happened to-day. If you only knew how I need you to talk to. Did you ever think, Sook, that life is one great arithmetic problem, an' it's a terrible hard one. Yet ya don't mind work-

DEAR SOOKY

in' on it even though you never get the answer. Even Mr. Hopkins, I betcha, couldn't think it out an' everybody knows he gets \$75 a week. If a man like that can't think it out, how's it going to be done?

Gee, I just got to tell ya about today. First, I went in through a great big room where there was lots of beds. Some people was sittin' up an' some was lyin' down, an' they didn't need no "Silence" signs to tell ya to be quiet like the smart people that own the libraries. A fellow just knows when to be quiet an' he don't need no tellin'.

All of a sudden, off in the corner came a moan, an' it made me think of a little tug cryin' for help away out in the ocean. I looked over an' there was a kid no bigger than us, just tossin' around. I was with the Doctor an' he said, "Come on over, Skip, here's a little pal that you can cheer up." Me an' the Doctor went over an' then the

DEAR SOOKY

Doctor says, "Well, son, here's Skippy to see you. He wants to say hello to you."

I didn't know how to say it so I tried to smile instead, but it went down in me somehow an' it was awful hard tryin' to swallow somethin' that didn't fit. The kid looked at me with tears flowin' down his cheeks, an' when our eyes took hold, I gulped the smile. For the first time in my life I knew that a swallow meant a buried prayer, an' your eyes give you away every time.

It was about time the Doctor used his voice. He said, "Michael here had a bad burn on his side, but he's almost better now. What do you say, Mike, isn't that so?" Mike was a game kid. He said, "Yes, Doctor." Then the Doctor started takin' off bandages an' he was awful swell about it. He said, "Now, don't mind this, Mike, you know I never want to hurt you, an' think of those roller skates I'm going to get you." An'

DEAR SOOKY

he keeps unwindin' the bandage all the time. "Why, just think—another fifty cents and they'll be yours, and when I get through taking off this bandage, Mike—there, there, don't cry, this is going to be another quarter, see, son?" Mike grits his teeth an' he says, "Doctor, then I'll only have to go another quarter after this, I—" an' he starts beatin' the mattress with his fists. The Doctor turns to me an' he says, "Skip, here's a little soldier. When other fellows would yell, he just beats the mattress like a drum an' makes believe he's going to war, because he isn't afraid. Isn't that a soldier?"

I just don't want to tell ya the rest, Sook, except that what the Doctor said was gettin' better, don't look that way to me. When the Doctor started puttin' the stuff on again, Mike—I got to callin' him Mike, too, right away, he didn't mind—I said, "Mike, do as the Doctor says an' I've got the swellest base-

DEAR SOOKY

ball glove for you, an' I'm going to bring it here tomorrow. It's yours an' I need guys like you on my team an' you're goin' to play third base."

Gee, just like that I give my brand new glove away, an' I never used it even. Oh, well, two Saturdays' work an' another baseball glove.

The Doctor told me when I was goin' out that he might have to put new skin on. Well, anyway I went an' spoke to the gang about it, an' Somerset Gohagen is just too disgusting for anythin'. All the fellows offered skin, an' the promises I got would plaster a wall, but Somerset Gohagen says, "My skin's freckled. Would that match?" I turned right back at him an' I said, "The doctors can pick out a part which ain't so freckled if that's what's botherin' ya." "No," Somerset says, "that ain't what's botherin' me. I was only wonderin', if he

DEAR SOOKY

wasn't freckled, would my freckles be contagion an' start him off frecklin'?" That guy can think of more excuses to get out of anythin' than anybody I ever knew. It's got me worried about givin' Somerset's skin to him now. When Mike gets better, he may want to know where I got that skin from, an' if he gets a look at Somerset Gohagen, I know he'd never forgive me, an' who could blame him?

Well, I've got to close now. This page is starin' me in the face. *A* is out buyin' potatoes again an' who do ya think he's buyin' them for?—*B*! Why doesn't *B* go out once in a while an' buy some potatoes for *A*? Poor old *A*—if he ain't buyin' potatoes, he's buyin' parsnips. Well, Pop's callin', "How's the homework coming?" Cheese it, he's comin' upstairs.

Good-bye.

SKIPPY.

DEAR SOOKY:

Today I made thirty cents by diggin' dandylions out of the front lawn, but it all went in the Sunday School barrel. I guess maybe that'll stop the whisperin' that's goin' on.

Once more I can lie back an' look the sky in the face, an' the star that's been peekin' at me so lonely for a month, acts like he wants to play; there he is now—blinkin' away. Darned if he doesn't make me think of you. Remember the way you used to wink?

I'm wonderin' if all the stars are the souls of a lot of regular guys, put out by God to cheer a feller up? If they are, Sook, I know the star that comes peepin' through my window every night must be you, 'cause you

DEAR SOOKY

was always the winkinest pal I ever knew.

That's why I write, 'cause I feel that you're lookin' down on me. I'd give anything to know if you liked the letters I left on my desk. I put them there so's your eye'd have something to twinkle over all through the night.

I just noticed the moon's lookin' over your shoulder. Where does he come off to wear a monocle . . .













